

Guidelines for Distance Learning Instructors

Prepared by the Mission College Distance Learning Committee

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Purpose of the Guidelines

In 2008, the Mission College Distance Learning Committee developed Regular Effective Student Contact (RESC) Guidelines and brought them forward to the Academic Senate. These guidelines were approved on Nov. 6, 2008 and have been used by faculty especially in the curriculum development process to incorporate regular effective student contact in distance learning courses. These updated guidelines further elaborate on RESC and offer online faculty specific strategies to improve distance learning courses based on the district's evaluation process. These guidelines can also be used by peer evaluators as they review online instructors to provide feedback for improvement of distance learning courses.

Our mission states that our first priorities are student learning and success. These guidelines are a step in improving student success and retention in our distance learning courses. We offer these guidelines to our faculty and college with the hope that the implementation will contribute to student learning and success and guide the college in supporting this growing program.

Definition of Distance Learning at Mission College

Distance Education as defined by the 2008 Omnibus Version of the *Distance Education Guidelines* from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office is as follows:

Distance education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology. In addition, instruction provided as distance education is subject to the requirements that may be imposed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. §12100 et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, (29 U.S.C. §794d).

Distance Education as defined by the 2010 *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges is as follows:

“Distance education is defined, for the purpose of accreditation review as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which supports regular and substantive interaction between the students and instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. Distance education often incorporates technologies such as the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, in conjunction with any of the other technologies.

Mission College incorporates both definitions for our program. At Mission College, elements of distance learning are also evident in many, if not most, courses with instructors using course

management systems, e-mail, external websites, and other technologies to provide distance learning opportunities for their on-campus classes.

The Distance Education Guidelines states “only those courses that are 51% or more in a distance education mode should be reported as Distance Education courses for state reporting purposes.” This document is intended for those courses defined as distance learning at Mission College and the state of California by virtue of having at least 51% of class time taught using communication technology for synchronous and/or asynchronous learning.

All distance learning courses must have an approved course outline through the Mission College Curriculum Review Committee and an approved Distance Learning Addendum detailing how regular effective contact will be achieved. These courses must be approved through the Mission College Curriculum Review Committee, the Office of Instruction, the Academic Senate, and the Board of Trustees before they are included in the schedule and offered to the students.

The Mission College guidelines and distance learning courses are in full compliance with both the state and accrediting agencies regulations regarding offering distance learning courses. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 requires institutions to authenticate the identity of distance education students. This means that all distance learning courses must be within an environment requiring secure log in procedures for authentication. Mission College provides this environment through Angel Learning. Faculty can use other systems as long as those systems require secure log in procedures for authentication.

Regular Effective Student Contact (RESC) Guidelines

The RESC guidelines were approved by the Academic Senate on Nov. 6, 2008. The RESC guidelines are included in this document in view of the fact that the additional guidelines are built upon the foundation of the RESC guidelines. They are also included to ensure that all of the guidelines are easily accessible from one document.

Regular Effective Student Contact Guidelines Approved on Nov. 6, 2008

Regular effective student contact (RESC) in the face-to-face class is achieved because the instructor can immediately determine the students’ understanding and engagement with the content because the students are physically in the classroom. The distance education environment allows for RESC to be accomplished using a variety of methods. Not all methods will be used by all instructors, but it is expected that several methods will be used since RESC should vary both for the course and for the student.

All distance learning courses (telecourses, online courses, audio/video conferencing, computer-assisted learning, and courses using all other types of distance education delivery) must

incorporate RESC. RESC may be provided in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, the following:

Technology-mediated interactions such as

- e-mail
- online discussions
- real-time interactions (live chat or whiteboard),
- self-check quizzes
- feedback on assignments
- telephone contact

Face-to-face interactions such as

- group and individual meetings
- orientation and review sessions
- supplemental seminars or study sessions
- field trips
- library workshops
- testing

Faculty should initiate regular effective student contact every week. Cumulative total time for contact should be the same as required for face-to-face instruction. The instructor should monitor the participation of students in the course. The instructor should have a written policy about turnaround time for answers to student-initiated contact (two business days maximum recommended). The instructor should provide and state in the syllabus regular times when he/she can be contacted by telephone or other means for individual or group support.

When developing courses for distance learning, faculty are advised to incorporate the Effective Practices for Instructor-Student Contact and Interactivity adopted by the California Community College Academic Senate in Spring of 2008. These practices are as follows:

- Ensure that the schedule description and course syllabus clearly establish whether the course is fully online or whether on-campus activities are expected;
- Ensure that instructor-student contact includes regular announcements about what is expected of students, including assignments due, upcoming tests, comments on recent activities in the course and email;
- Ensure that regular contact also includes regularly added, faculty-created course content. Instructor presence can be established both one-on-one and through global course changes;
- Strive to maintain a regular presence in the course by responding to discussion forums and answer questions regularly;

- In the first weeks of a course, make an extra effort to maintain an active, daily presence;
- Use forum functionality to create asynchronous discussions regarding course content that encourage critical thinking; participation in discussions should be part of the student evaluation methodology;
- Create a discussion forum for general questions regarding the course but do not rely only this alone to assist students;
- Address students by name when responding to discussion postings and emails;
- Change subject lines of instructor discussion board responses to match the content of the response, which helps students to find information that is of interest to them;
- Provide activities that incorporate a wide variety of instructional methodologies to address multiple learning styles.

Guideline for Instructors and Peer Evaluators of Distance Learning Courses

The following instructional guidelines for online instruction are intended to provide support and assistance to faculty who are teaching distance learning courses. These strategies and best practices are largely taken from *Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates* adopted spring 2008 from the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. They offer sound pedagogical advice for designing and delivering online courses and are an expansion of our Regular Effective Contact Guidelines. The Mission College Distance Learning Committee has taken these guidelines and structured them in a format that aligns with the evaluation of distance learning courses and thus serve as guidelines for evaluators as well.

Course Activities

- Make available to students a variety of delivery modes so that students have more than one way to access the materials. This includes textbook, video, text, animations, audio files, PowerPoint lectures, discussion board items, tutorials, self-check quizzes, and group learning projects
- Consider incorporating the following seven principles into course activities.
 - Encourage faculty to student interaction
 - Encourage student to student interaction
 - Promote active learning
 - Communicate high expectations
 - Facilitate time on task
 - Provide rich, rapid feedback
 - Respect diverse learning

Course Content

- Instructor-created elements of the course should demonstrate appropriate depth and rigor of the subject matter.

- Publisher provided materials should integrate effectively with instructor created materials.
- Combined publisher and instructor provided material is sufficient for students to accomplish the course objectives and meet the same student learning outcomes as the classroom-based course.
- Instructor-created content provides opportunities for student interaction and collaboration.

Interaction with Students

- The instructor explains the guidelines in the course syllabus for instructor to student feedback. At Mission College, the recommendation is to have no more than a two business day response time to student e-mails.
- Instructor contact may include regular announcements about what is expected of students, including assignments due, upcoming tests, comments on recent activities in the course, and email.
- The instructor responds to discussion forums and answers questions regularly.
- Instructor makes a concerted effort to maintain an active, daily presence.
- The instructor uses the discussion forums to create asynchronous discussions regarding course content that encourage critical thinking; and participation. This should be part of the evaluation methodology.
- The instructor creates a discussion forum for general questions regarding the course but does not rely on this alone to assist students.
- The instructor addresses students by name when responding to discussion postings and emails.
- The instructors' use of CCC Confer and other such technologies, online office hours can be held and archived.
- Instructor online office hours may be more useful to students if offered outside of normal business hours.
- The instructor may offer online students in-person office hours.

Organization and Presentation

- All materials are accessible and compliant with Electronic and Information Technology Section 508, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (1998, 2000 Amendments) and California SB 105 (September, 2002). This includes content and instructional systems such as the course management system.
- Course content is organized in such a way that students can easily find content within a reasonable number of clicks.
- Course content is in discrete chunks to permit students to easily complete a course element in a limited time and allow for the student to readily return to a section of content.

- Students are able to easily locate content items and understand when and how they will be added or removed based on timelines set by the instructor.
- Consideration should be given to how students submit assignments. Students should be advised in the syllabus if additional equipment other than a computer and Internet access is needed to submit assignments or succeed in the class.

Teaching Techniques

- The instructor uses a variety of instructional methods to accommodate different learning styles.
- Repetition, interactivity, and opportunities for self-assessment including quizzes and student reflections on their own progress are provided.
- Publisher materials are most effectively used when faculty add value to these materials by providing discussion forums and remediation or advanced materials for students as needed.

Recommendations for Qualifications for Teaching Distance Learning Classes

In order to teach a distance learning course at Mission College, it is recommended that instructors meet one or both of the following criteria:

- Successfully completed a course of no less than 3 semester units or equivalent in how to teach distance learning, and a minimum of one semester of experience teaching a class that incorporated a course management system
- Have prior experience as an online instructor using a course management system with a minimum of two semesters of teaching online courses.

Institutional Support and Needs

The college and the district should provide support for the distance learning program to ensure high-quality teaching and delivery of course material, and to enable faculty to implement the recommended guidelines.

- Faculty require support for technology training and training in distance learning course design. Financial incentives, release time, sabbaticals, stipends, professional growth and incentive units should be used to assist faculty in getting the training they need.
- Technical support for faculty and students available on a year-around basis is essential for the distance learning program. Since our course management system serves both the distance learning program and our classroom-based program as well, we recommend that a 24/7 help desk be provided at least during the beginning and end of terms when technical support demands are greatest.
- Technology software tools are continually changing and making course development more efficient. Faculty require the tools and training in how to use the tools; therefore, it

is recommended that a set amount of money be allocated for obtaining these tools and the training.

- Marketing of approved distance learning certificates and degrees is highly recommended.
- Stronger ties with the technology committee for support with resources including hardware and software for faculty and classrooms. Stronger ties with institutional research aimed at providing more data to help improve retention and success of online students.
- Increased financial support for faculty to attend conferences and workshops, to create curriculum, and to develop skills to ensure that the distance learning program remains competitive, and attracts students from within California and beyond.
- Increased online student services such as counseling, disability support, tutoring, financial aid, assessment, and other relevant services to support student learning and success.

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